14: Huffman M-5 (no date) 1931
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262 are dura, corn, mutton, beef, the flesh of some wild animals—antelope, gazelle, waterbuck—guinea fowl, fish, crocodile—which is considered a choice food—beans, milk, and sometimes greens. This does not mean that these foods are constantly at hand. The average diet of a Nuer consists of dura, fish, milk, and occasionally meat. This limitation of diet works the greatest hardship for little children and the sick and aged.

A Nuer seldom kills a cow unless one has to be offered as a sacrifice. Sheep are not often primarily killed for food. Wild animals are not often available for they usually must be killed with a gun—and who has a gun? Even guinea fowl are not easily caught.

A Nuer will, generally speaking, not eat wild duck. Eggs are not eaten by men as they are considered effeminate. Milk is likewise not regarded as food for men, but women and children and sick men may drink it. Women refuse [841] to drink milk during their menstrual periods.

243 The staple article of food is dura, or kaffir corn as we call it. The dura is planted in May, providing the early rains have begun. If the rainy season is late the planting is delayed until the ground has been softened by several rains so that hoeing is possible. Small hand-hoes are used. Everybody hoes—men, women, and children each do their part in getting the field ready to be planted. The seed dura, which has been kept over from the past year, is sown. It requires to be hoed several times during the season, for the frequent rains make weeds grow as well as dura. In late September or early October, according to the time of planting, the dura is ready to be cut.

[791] When harvest time approaches a 'guk kwoth' or 'prophet of god' is consulted as to when they may cut their dura, and his advice is heeded.

14: Huffman M-5 (no date) 1931
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in a way this is true. The Nuer find it hard to believe that God is a God of love. Even when they learn to love Him they still find it hard to trust Him when things go wrong. But the missionaries do not get too discouraged, for, after all, is not that habit world-wide?

A large portion of the Nuer tribe has never heard the Christian message. Of those who have heard it, few have yet made full response. Yet the influence of those who honour the name of Christ will make its mark upon the Nuer and lead to the forsaking of unworthy customs inherited from the past.

Although the Arab traders throughout Nuerland are Moslem, their religion has not appealed to the Nuer; the Moslem faith has so far gained no ground in Nuerland.

## SUPERSTITIONS

The Nuer mind is full of superstitions, some of them being age-old. They believe them implicitly; 'Would our parents lie to us?' they ask when any doubt is expressed. Many of the superstitions have to do with cattle (see Chapter II) and marriage (see Chapter V.)

A woman must never drink milk during her menstrual period. Nor at this time may she eat food which has been cooked in a kettle in which milk has been boiled. Why? Because to do so would harm the cattle.

If a woman is impregnated while still nursing a child, they cut a small piece off the ear of a dog and this is worn around the child's neck in order to keep it from harm. Any one walking in the footsteps of the father of this child may be the victim of dreadful things—his head may split right down the back.

If a child should have an attack of vomiting just after some strangers have been to the village, the strangers are at once suspected of having in part caused the attack.

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
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775 As Nuer speak about *cien* it has, therefore, the sense of an
626 injustice crying out for vengeance. The essence of the concept is the notion of a wrong unrighted, of a grievance which demands, and rightly demands, redress. Even a living man who has no other way of getting justice may say to the man who has wronged him '*ba ji cien*', 'I will haunt you', meaning that though he cannot get justice now he will get it after he is dead. Nuer say that he may express this threat not in words but by looks. As in the case of the *biit*, so with the *cien*, it is God who makes the ghostly vengeance to work. Nuer say that the wronged ghost exacts vengeance by making his cause known to God, who sooner or later punishes the wrongdoer.

753 The moral action of *biit* and *cien*, which have a similarity to certain ideas of sin discussed in the next chapter, is in this respect very different for Nuer from the exercise of psychical and physical powers which have no moral foundation and are therefore not thought to involve divine judgement and intervention and are only thought of in connexion with Spirit, if at all, so far as all that happens in the world can ultimately be said to happen because God allows it and can be appealed to to change the course of
[843] events. I refer to the evil eye (*peth*); ghouls (*roth*); the danger of pregnant women (*ther*) and to a lesser extent of their husbands,
[177] an idea some of the eastern Nuer have taken over from the Anuak;
[841] the danger of women who commence menstruation in the dry season month of *pet* (*koc mai*); the danger of a child after two or three of its elder brothers and sisters have died at, or shortly after,
[842] birth (*jul*); monorchids (*tor*), a child conceived while its mother is still suckling (*mok*); and menstruation, which is dangerous for the cattle—no woman may drink their milk at this time. If Nuer are in danger from any of these influences they may pray and sacrifice to God, but if they do so their prayers and sacrifices are mixed up with all sorts of other and different sets of ideas and they deal with the situation mainly by magical rites which would be both inappropriate and ineffective where Spirit is concerned. They therefore cannot properly be included under the rubric of religion and so lie outside the scope of this book. They are mentioned only in order that their relative unimportance may be emphasized. That in itself is of significance. Perspective would be lost were it not understood.

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
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in the home of his parents-in-law they avoid offering him milk from the cattle he has paid them. Further, if there is a divorce and the bridewealth cattle are returned to the husband's people they sacrifice a goat before they drink of their milk.

Nuer 'respect with regard to food' unrelated people (*nei ti gwagh*) of the opposite sex, especially if they are unmarried and possible sweethearts. They will not eat with them or even see them, or be seen by them, eating and drinking, and food must not be mentioned when they are both present. The sexes, unless they are kin, avoid each other in the matter of food. Nuer feel so strongly about this avoidance that I was obliged to observe it strictly myself.

Another situation in reference to which one hears the word *thek* is homicide. I discuss it in greater detail in Chapter XII. A man who slays another respects water—he may not drink—until a priest has made sacrifice and cut his right arm. Then until the blood-feud is closed by payment of cattle and by sacrifices the kin of the slayer and the kin of the slain may not eat or drink from vessels from which the other has eaten or drunk. They respect the vessels and the food and water of the other party. Even to use the same vessels at the home of a third party who is in no way connected with the feud may entail the most serious consequences. A third party may cause death to one side or the other by eating or drinking with both.

Another use of the word *thek*, which, as always, contains the idea of avoidance, is in reference to burial and to mortuary sacrifices. Those who bury a corpse respect water—they may not drink—until they have been cleansed. Members of a dead man's age-set abstain from the meat of the cattle sacrificed at the ceremony held to close the period of mourning for him. They are said to respect the meat. It has been noted earlier (p. 55) that people may not eat or drink in the homes of close kin of a person struck by lightning before they have sacrificed. Another use is in connexion with the eldest child of a marriage. He respects the spoons of his parents and the sleeping-hide of his mother. He is careful not to eat with the first or sit on the second. Were he to do so he might cause the mother to be barren and injure the father, himself, and the cattle. A man is also said to respect his as yet unconceived children by abstaining from congress with his wife when she is menstruating[1]

[1] He is not said to *thek*, respect, his wife when she is menstruating. He

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196 784 [834] [841] [234] and while she is suckling an infant, for a child born of union in these forbidden periods is a child of misfortune. A woman in her periods respects the milk of cows; she may only drink goat's milk at this time. Nuer also use the word *thek* to refer to the prohibition on men milking cows. Men respect the cows with regard to milking. Milking is done only by women and boys. It can happen, however, that on journeys there are no women or boys present, and in these circumstances men may milk the cows on condition that each gets another to milk his cows for him. I learnt in 1936 that a youth, Tot, who in 1931 had been a member of my household, had died as a result of having milked a cow at night in the byre of his home and drunk the milk.

196 776 784 One of the commonest uses of *thek* is, as we have seen, in reference to totems. A man respects his totem by refraining from harming it in any way (pp. 64 seq.). The respect is mutual and the totem should refrain from harming those who respect it. We have also noted earlier (p. 129) the respect relationship between twins and birds. The word is also used for the attitude of a man towards his fetish.

196 784 *Thek* has, therefore, in all its contexts of usage a sense of deference, constraint, modesty or shyness, or a mixture of these attitudes. It seems often to carry as part of its load of meaning a feeling of embarrassment which is entirely lacking in the ordinary behaviour of Nuer towards persons and nature. The behaviour associated with it is formalistic and includes always avoidance and abstention, though it will have been observed that these need not be absolute. A man does not in any way avoid his cows except with regard to (*ke kwi*) milking them.[1]

The purpose and function of these respect relationships are

observes or honours (*luth*) t[illegible]ys of her indisposition. On the other hand, *thek* may be used to speak of a w[illegible]an being in her periods, it being understood that what she respects are the cattle. The word can thus be used as a polite euphemism for 'to menstruate'.

[1] While a man does not respect a cow dedicated to a spirit, Dr. Smith tells me that he can be said to respect it with regard to milk and marriage. Only members of his family may drink its milk and it must not be used for marriage, unless in either case the spirit gives its consent. Dr. Lienhardt tells me that a man can also be said to respect such a cow with regard to urine, in that he does not use it for domestic purposes. As I was not aware of these particular usages of the word *thek* I can only record this information without discussing it. A breach of the prohibitions would certainly involve liability (pp. 39–40) but it would not be classed as *nueer*.